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THE STATUS OF THE SOVIET WINTER GRAIN CROP AS OF MID-JANUARY 1974

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The Soviet Union planted an estimated 37 million hectares of *winter grains* last fall, slightly above plan and roughly the same as the average area sown for harvest in 1968-72.¹

A very wet fall slowed sowing operations in some winter grain areas. In addition, an early cold spell over most of the European USSR slowed the development and reduced the hardiness of the grain at the onset of winter dormancy. Growing conditions were particularly unfavorable in the Central Black Earth Region, although below-normal temperatures also hampered the development of the seedlings in portions of the Lower Volga, Northeast Ukraine, and North Caucasus Regions. At the same time, below-normal rainfall during late fall retarded plant development in certain southern areas, where 20% of the winter grain is usually produced.

Because of the delayed sowing and unfavorable weather, at least 5% to 10% of the *winter wheat* sowings are estimated to have entered the dormancy period (beginning mid-November to mid-December) in poor condition (see the map).² In the Central Black Earth Region, which has 6% of the winter grain area, the condition of the grain was so bad that it is doubtful that much of it can survive a normal winter. Plant development on another one-fourth of the winter grain area probably was insufficient to prevent winterkill from severe weather.

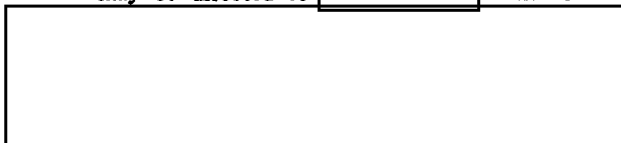
Subsequently, the snow cover needed to insulate the plants from killing air temperatures was thin or absent over most of the winter grain area through late January. After an unusual thaw in late December, a sudden cold spell gripped the European USSR in mid-January. Significant areas of winter grains probably perished.³

1. Winter grains normally account for less than one-fourth of total harvested grain acreage but about one-third of total grain production. Winter grains have a special importance in the Soviet grain balance. On the area that survives the winter, yields are not as variable as they are for the principal spring grains, and the yields of winter wheat are almost twice those of spring wheat. The major winter grain areas are the North Caucasus and the Ukraine (predominantly winter wheat) followed by the Volga, Central, and Volga-Vyatka Regions (predominantly winter rye).

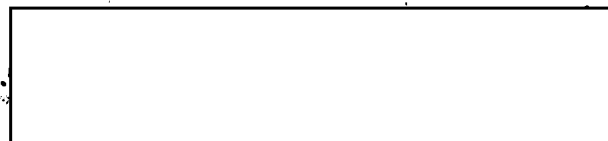
2. *Winter wheat* acreage normally accounts for nearly two-thirds of total fall-sown grains. No estimate is available for the condition of *winter rye* (about one-third of fall-sown acreage) or *winter barley* (usually less than 5%).

3. The Soviet press admitted that the severe freezing had "possibly damaged" sowings in the Northeast Ukraine, the Central Black Earth Region, and the Lower Volga.

Note: Comments and queries regarding this paper are welcomed. They may be directed to [redacted] of the Office of Economic Research,



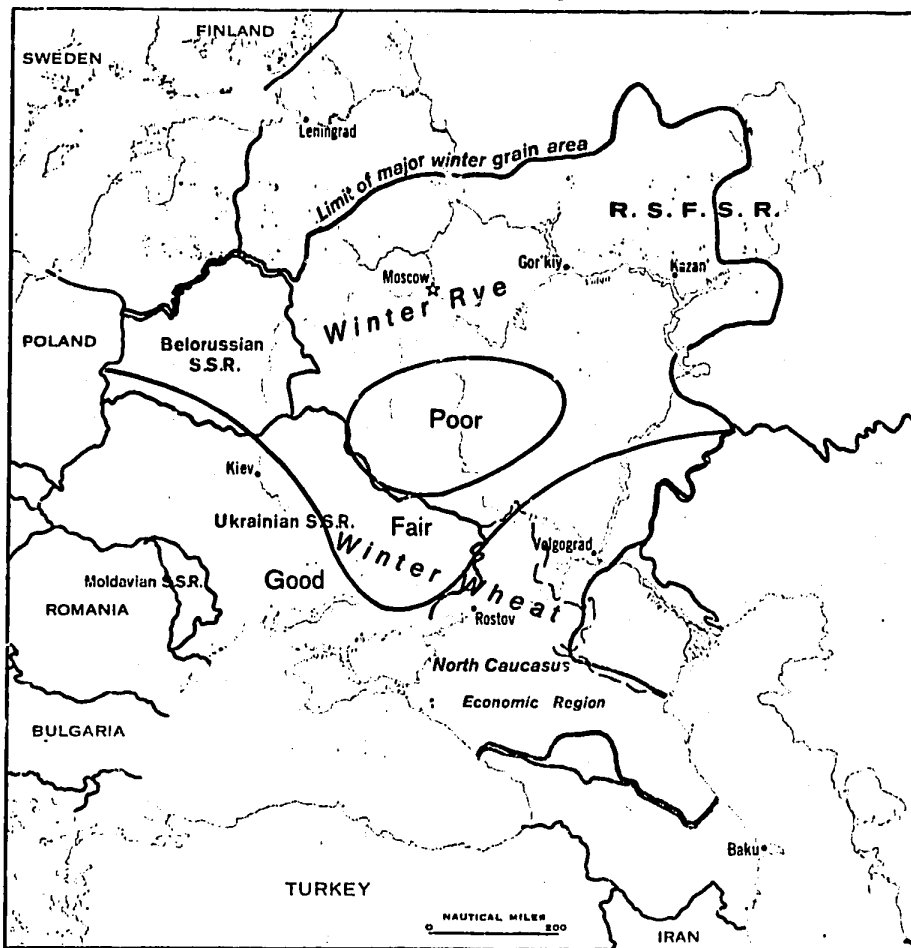
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The full extent of winter damage will depend on weather conditions in February and March. The most dangerous period will be just before spring, when periods of thawing and freezing alternate. At this stage, the rate of loss already promises to be much higher than last year's 6% and possibly above the average of 20% in the last 10 years (see the chart). As in previous years, the USSR can make up these losses by planting a larger area to spring grains. This would result in a lower production of wheat and rye, however, as winterkilled areas are reseeded almost exclusively to feed grains.

Condition of Winter Wheat at Dormancy*



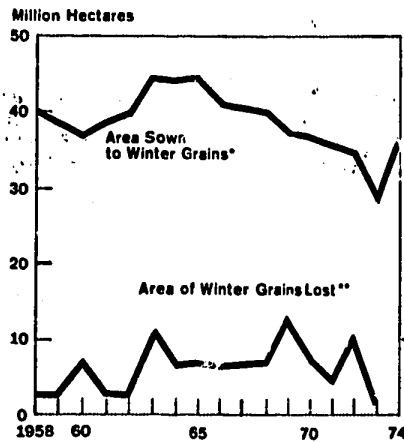
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Condition	Share of Acreage
Good	56%
Fair	25%
Poor	7%
Unknown**	12%

*Based on temperatures between sowing dates in Fall, 1973 and beginning of dormancy.

**Includes areas for which no information is available: Transcaucasus, Central Asia, and Kazakhstan.

History of Winterkill in the Soviet Union



*Sown in the preceding fall for harvest in the given year.

**Also includes some fall sown grains used as green forage crops for livestock in the spring.

Area of Winter Grains Lost as a Percent of Total Area Sown to Winter Grains

